



Altarum

Genesee County – Juvenile Justice Mental Health/Delinquency Prevention Grant: Final Evaluation Report

Title II Category: Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention

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Executive Summary

The Altarum Institute provided support to the Genesee County 7th Judicial Circuit Court – Family Division (Court) as they implemented a Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Title II Grant intervention¹, awarded by the state of Michigan. The objective of the Court’s intervention was to increase overall school engagement and decrease rates of delinquency across youth in Genesee County. Altarum worked with the Court throughout the grant period to support program maintenance, data collection, and evaluate impact. This report outlines the program’s approach and the final evaluation results.

Project Overview

The Court contracted with Easterseals, a local community mental health organization, to provide their existing Intensive Family Support (IFS) program at an earlier stage of intervention. The IFS program provides case management support to youth and families, connecting them to services that can support them to stay in school and decrease delinquencies. The goal of their intervention for the grant was to decrease the rate of formal court petitions for youth in the county that are tied to truancy or neglect issues by connecting youth and families to needed services in the community earlier, prior to formal involvement with the Court.

Evaluation

Throughout the grant period, from February 2022 through September 2023, data was collected on referrals to the program, participation and engagement in the IFS program, and formal petitions across the county. The grant evaluation compared the rates of formal neglect and delinquency petitions for youth in the community before and after the expansion of IFS case management services.

Results

The evaluation results showed a decrease in educational neglect and truancy petitions in Genesee County as a result of the grant intervention. These results suggest increasing the program’s capacity to provide case management services to more at-risk youth before involving the court might be associated with a reduction in the number of formal court petitions in the community. This data acts as evidence that the supports and services provided have a positive impact on youths’ lives and may successfully divert participating youth from the juvenile justice system.

Conclusion

Data on the ability to successfully divert participating youth from the juvenile justice system coupled with positive testimonials from families involved with the IFS program serve as evidence that the supports and services provided have a positive impact on youths’ lives.

¹ The OJJDP Title II Formula Grants Program provides funding to support state and local efforts to plan, establish, operate, coordinate, and evaluate policies and projects, directly or through grants and contracts with public and private agencies for the development of more effective education, training, research, prevention, diversion, treatment, and rehabilitation programs in the area of juvenile delinquency as well as juvenile justice system improvement efforts.

Introduction and Background

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and the Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice (MCJJ) administers the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Title II Formula Grants Program to support local efforts to prevent and address juvenile delinquency as well as improve the juvenile justice system. MDHHS and MCJJ contracted with Altarum Institute (Altarum) to provide technical assistance (TA) and evaluation support to Title II grant recipients.

In 2022, MDHHS and MCJJ selected the Genesee County 7th Judicial Circuit Court – Family Division (Court) as one of the Title II program grantees and funded the Court to expand case management support services for youth and their families in need and ultimately decrease the number of delinquency petitions coming to the Court. The specific goals were to target school engagement and decrease rates of delinquency and formal petitions to the Court. The Genesee County 7th Judicial Circuit Court – Family Division operated its Title II grant from February 2022 through September 2023. Altarum provided TA and evaluation services to the Court during this timeframe. This report describes the Court’s Title II grant program and its evaluation goals, methods, results, and recommendations.

Program Background

Recent data indicates that students who do not attend school regularly often experience higher rates of physical and mental health diagnoses, face substance use problems, and are more likely to come in contact with the juvenile justice system². Children who have been court-petitioned (e.g., formally summoned by the court regarding truancy or delinquency) are among the most at-risk for criminal involvement and school failure³. Within Genesee County, approximately 30% of all petitions received in the Court are school attendance petitions, from both educational neglect and truancy petitions. Historical context across the county has highlighted that school attendance petitions can typically indicate youth (ages 6-16) and families within their community may be experiencing additional mental health and/or social determinants of health issues.

The Court has worked with the Genesee County Attendance Task Force, over the past few years, and has found that court-based interventions do not always lead to success. Based on the Court’s experience, early intervention with supportive services that address the barriers for school attendance has proven to be successful in diverting youth and families from the formal court system. The Court recognized that intensive support interventions, implemented at point of identified need for services, would be the key to success in improving school engagement and preventing youth involvement in the criminal justice system.

There was an existing partnership with Easterseals, a local community mental health organization with a long history of providing services to the most in-need in the communities they serve, to run the Intensive Family Support (IFS) program. The IFS program offers supportive, wrap-around services for families under the jurisdiction of the Court in child protective proceedings. The IFS program provides case management support to “high-risk” youth and families, assessing their overall needs and connecting them to services that can support them to stay in school and avoid delinquencies and other negative behaviors. “High-risk” refers to youth between the ages 6-16 who have already or are

² Youth.gov. (2023). *Youth involved with the Juvenile Justice System*. Youth Involved with the Juvenile Justice System | Youth.gov. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice/youth-involved-juvenile-justice-system>

³ Balfanz, R.W., Spiridakis, K., Neild, R.C., & Legters, N.E. (2003). High-poverty secondary schools and the juvenile justice system: how neither helps the other and how that could change. *New directions for youth development*, 99, 71-89.

likely to come under the jurisdiction of the Court through a formal petition or through formal mediation within the school system due to truancy or delinquency. Due to previously demonstrated success, the IFS program was expanded with this grant to increase the capacity of the IFS program and allow referrals to the program to occur pre-petition for all school attendance petitions.

Program Description

The Court contracted with Easterseals to expand their existing IFS program, increasing the number of “high-risk” youth they are able to work with by bringing the intervention upstream to an earlier point in time. The goal of their intervention for the grant was to decrease the rate of formal court petitions for youth in the county that are tied to truancy and educational neglect issues (previously 30% of all petitions) by intervening prior to formal involvement of the Court. Through this expanded program, youth were now allowed to be referred by their school to IFS prior to the formal petition threshold of 10 truanancies. This expansion provided more youth and families with intensive case management for mental health and social services and aimed to lessen the overall involvement of the juvenile justice system. The Court collected data on referrals to the program, participation and engagement in the IFS program, and formal petitions across the county. The evaluation assessed the impact of the expanded IFS program design by comparing the rates of formal petitions of youth in the community before and after expansion of IFS case management services. The goal of the evaluation was to show that the IFS program design could decrease the number of youth proceeding to formal petitions and involvement with the juvenile justice system and increase youth success in school.

Evaluation

Beginning in February 2022, Altarum worked collaboratively with the Court to design and implement a plan to meet the grant evaluation requirements. Together, Altarum and the Court outlined the evaluation process and outcome measures, and procedures for data collection, analysis, and reporting. The Altarum team worked regularly with the Court grant team to aggregate data for the evaluation to outline the impact of the intervention on the target audience.

Evaluation Methods

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the impact of increasing the capacity of the IFS program and allowing referrals to the program to occur prior to court petitions. Evaluation to show delinquency prevention focused on court petition rates for youth in Genesee County and engagement with the program. The Court and Easterseals tracked youth petition data and additional output metrics including pre-petition referrals to IFS, intake assessments, plans of service, and number of case management meetings with youth, families, and the school. Data was reported to the Altarum team quarterly. The grant evaluation compared the rates of formal educational neglect and truancy petitions for youth in the community before and after expansion of IFS case management services, designed to focus on barriers for school attendance.

Altarum conducted the evaluation using all data received from the six quarters (18 months) of the intervention within the grant period to identify trends and assess the impact of the intervention. The results of the evaluation highlight how early intervention with comprehensive support services can divert youth from interacting with the criminal justice system and help them be successful in school.

Youth Petitions

The Court was responsible for collecting and reporting the number of youth petitions filed in all of

Genesee County to assess the impact of increased family services on youth delinquency and court petition prevention. The Court provided annual petition data from the 2017/2018 Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) through the 2022/2023 period. Understanding the importance that school attendance has in diverting youth and families from the formal system, two specific types of petitions were tracked: educational neglect and truancy, which are subsets of all neglect petitions and delinquency petitions respectively. The Court, in partnership with EasterSeals, also provided regular data on the youth referred to the program, their engagement on a binary scale, and whether they received a formal petition.

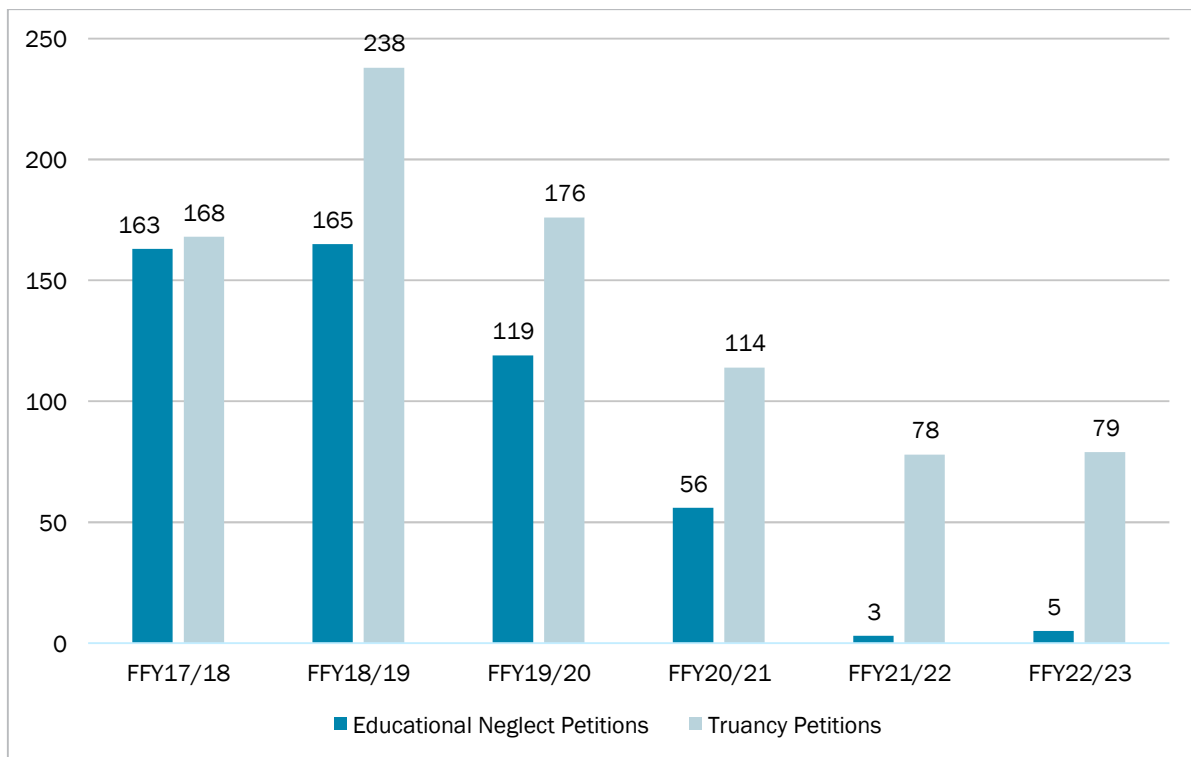
Evaluation Results

This section includes the key findings generated from the Altarum evaluation team’s analysis of data regarding the program’s implementation and outcomes achieved during the grant.

Decrease in Youth Petitions

The Court provided Altarum with petition data for the past six FFYs, beginning in FFY 17/18 (October 1, 2017-September 30, 2018) and ending in FFY 22/23 (October 1, 2022-September 30, 2023). During this time a total of 6286 neglect and delinquency petitions were filed. In total, there were 2294 delinquency petitions filed, 853 of which were related to truancy, and 3992 neglect petitions, with 511 of those being educational neglect. **Figure 1** below shows the decrease in educational neglect and truancy petitions across the county from FY 2017/18 through FY2023/2023.

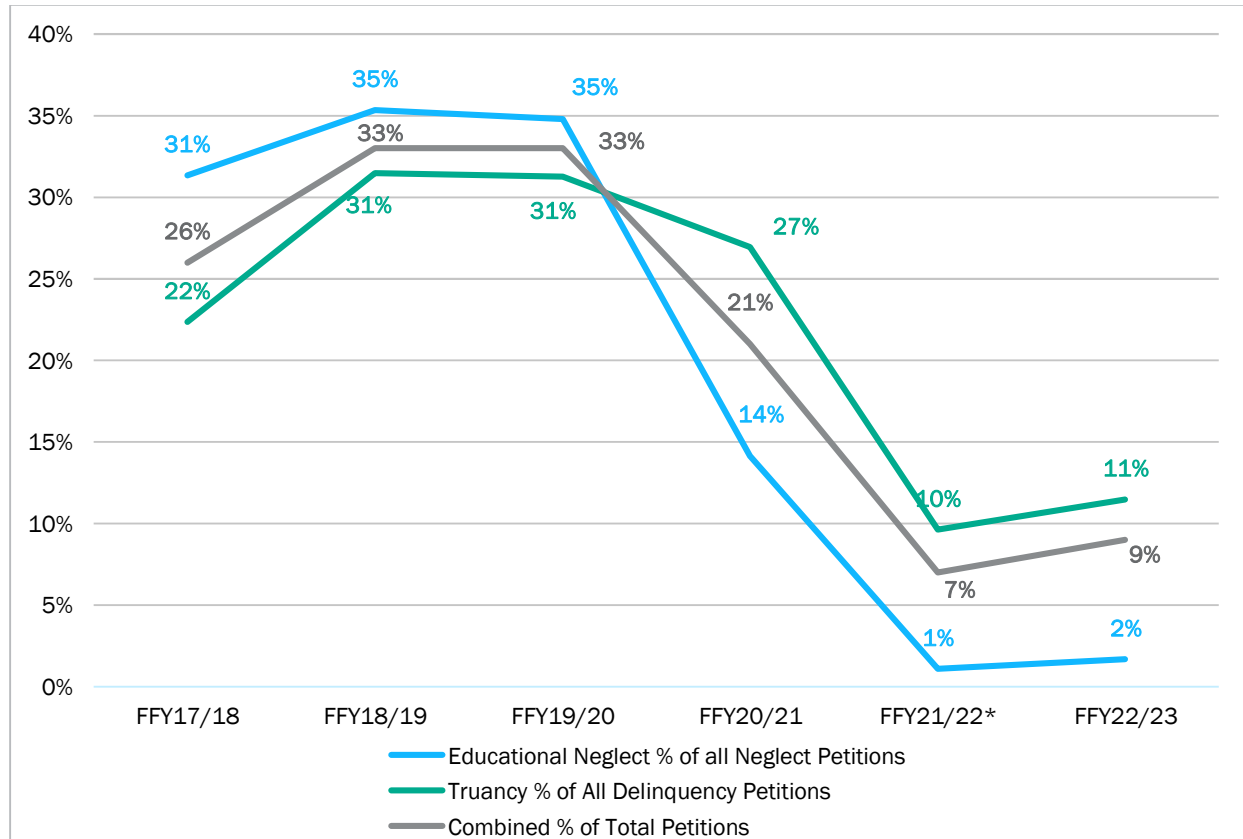
Figure 1. Total Annual Education Neglect & Truancy Petitions in Genesee County



As these numbers show, there was a large drop in the number of educational neglect and truancy petitions filed from FFY 17/18 to FFY 22/23. As previously stated, educational neglect petitions and

truancy petitions are a subset of neglect and delinquency petitions respectively. **Figure 2** shows the change in the rate of educational neglect and truancy petitions across all neglect and delinquency petitions within Genesee County.

Figure 2. Educational Neglect & Truancy Rate of Total Neglect and Delinquency Petitions in Genesee



*Fiscal year when IFS program expansion began

The IFS program was expanded as part of this grant in early 2022, thereby the first FFY that would show potential impact of the program would be FFY 21/22. As the data shows, the rate of educational neglect petitions dropped from 14% of all neglect petitions in FFY 20/21 to only 1% and 2% in FFY 21/22 and FFY 22/23, respectively. Truancy petitions, as a subset of all delinquency petitions, dropped from 27% in FFY 20/21 to 10% and 11% respectively following the expansion of the IFS program.

This figure suggests that the educational neglect and truancy petitions decreased following expansion of IFS programming. The abrupt drop from 21% of cases to 7% of cases in FFY 21/22 and 9% in FFY 22/23 is in line with the intervention period, indicating a potential positive relationship between IFS program expansion and the reduction of formal court petitions in Genesee County. Overall, the percentage of educational neglect and truancy petitions within the overall neglect and delinquency petitions in Genesee County also dropped with the IFS program expansion in early 2022.

Program Utilization

During the 18 months of the grant intervention implementation and data collection, there were 170 youth referrals made to the IFS program with 64 intake appointments completed and 55 plans of service developed. A total of 529 contacts were made with program participants. Only eight youth (12.5% of total youth participating in program), all of whom had had an intake appointment and plan of service developed, received a court petition after engagement with IFS staff. The data shows high utilization of program services provided through the grant period. Each metric experienced apexes during different quarters throughout the grant period, as seen in **Figure 3** below. Decreases in rates of referrals and engagement with services occurs with summer months and periods of school being out of session, evident by the lower numbers in those quarters. Further, the spike in numbers when school resumes in the fall is likely associated with increased activity of the grant program team working closely with schools to encourage referrals to IFS.

Figure 3. IFS Program Service Delivery from 2022-2023

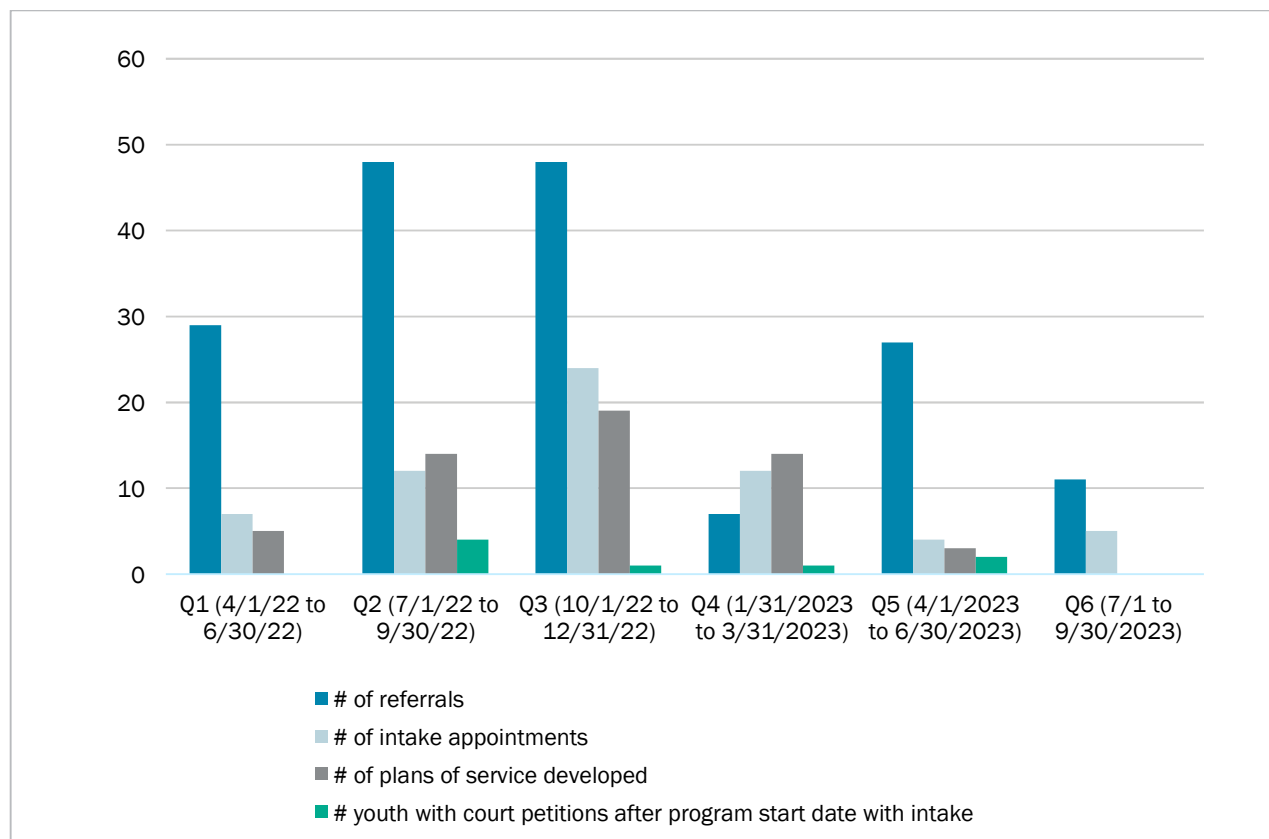
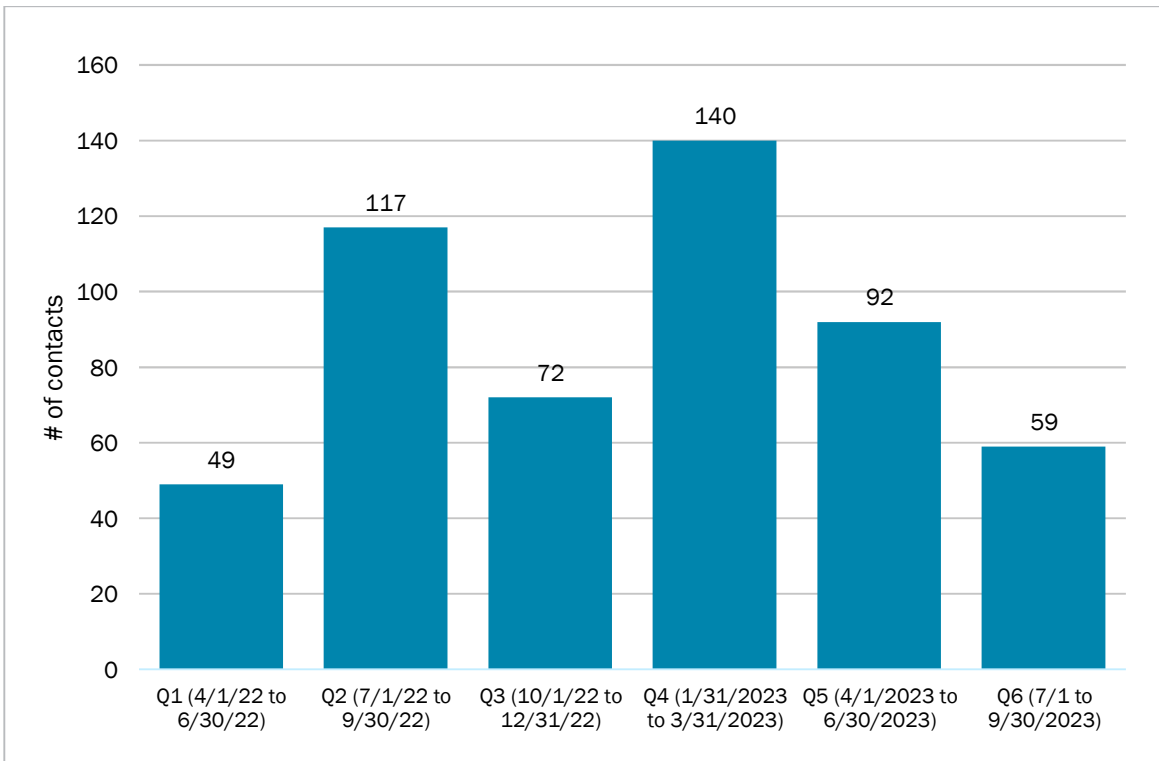


Figure 4 lays out the number of contacts made with youth participants per quarter. As shown in these figures, there is variation in program services provided from quarter to quarter across the intervention period. Similarly, to the graph above, this is likely due to seasonal impacts, such as schools being out of session during the summer months. However, it is noticeable that engagement numbers are less variable than referral numbers. This is potentially tied to the nature of the program and the longitudinal aspect of the IFS case management services. Case managers continued to meet with youth regularly despite how long they had been connected to the program. Therefore, seasonal impacts to referrals are less apparent in engagement because the case managers were still

supporting all youth on their caseloads quarter over quarter.

Figure 4. IFS Program Youth Participant Engagement Throughout Grant



Client Satisfaction

Beyond the quantifiable impact that the program has had across the county, the qualitative information that has been gathered by the Easterseals case workers further highlights the positive impact they have been able to have on youth in the community. The program has shown to help youth that are struggling in school get back on track. Further, the case workers are able to support the entire family to get connected to the services they need in the community whether that be related to social services or mental health.

The IFS support services are appreciated immensely by the clients and their families. For many, they noted it was wonderful to feel as if an organization was there for them and felt they were deserving of help. Other family members of youth that have been served by IFS have indicated that having their support has been “such a relief...normally [they] would be so overwhelmed trying to figure this out...but having [their] help takes a lot of the pressure off.”

“We all love you here, you've been an angel to our family.”

- IFS Participant to a Prevention Specialist

"I super appreciate you! I am glad to know someone thinks I am deserving of help."

[Statement from mother whose son missed over 100 days of school]

"Having you is just such a relief normally I would be so overwhelmed trying to figure this out all on my own but having your help takes a lot of the pressure off."

[Statement from single father with special needs daughter facing unexpected and abrupt eviction]

"Thanks so much for all of your help through all of these tough times. He loves school now and is passing all of his classes and was even chosen for student of the month!"

[Statement from mother whose son missed over 100 days of school]

Many of the families involved with the program have been connected to services that are outside of the school jurisdiction and focus on general social services such as housing, transportation, food assistance and many others. One family supported by a single mother that was experiencing homelessness was connected to secure housing through IFS. In a testimonial from the mother, she shared her gratitude by saying "thank you for being the main person in my life to help me build a sturdy foundation, I have never felt comfortable trusting anyone to help me before." Their close family friends echo that sentiment, noting that they knew how happy they were to have this support. IFS supports meet the family and the youth where they are – connecting them to services that are geared towards their needs and work with them closely to achieve success, whatever that may look like. But this program has shown through the numbers and the qualitative data shared with Easterseals that it is having a positive impact on the individual youth, families, and County as a whole.

Data Limitations

It is important to note that this data has limitations. Due to data collection processes, the Altarum team was unable to quantitatively tie the intervention directly to all cases that received a petition or not or investigate the potential factors within those cases. Furthermore, there is no way to define the level of engagement in services and the number of resources received by the youth or their families. This limited ability to conduct statistical analyses or evaluation of scale of the impact for youth across various levels. Lastly, due to the timeline of the grant, the data collection only covered youth served in the 18-month implementation period. Therefore, the sample size for this evaluation was relatively small. Finally, the time period and structure of the grant do not allow for a longitudinal study of the impact of the intervention, but future efforts could look into the lasting impacts.

Recommendations

As a result of the efforts conducted by the Court and Easterseals through this grant, numerous promising practices for service delivery exist for other municipalities to potentially replicate or for Genesee County to sustain the program it has created. For the sustainability of this program, the Altarum evaluation team would recommend revisiting data collection capabilities and enhancing the metrics that are collected and tracked throughout the service delivery. The goal would be to ensure deeper data is collected regarding the engagement of youth across the services they are connected to through IFS and Easterseals case managers. This would allow for definition or analysis across the program results to understand the services and factors of the program that lead to the greatest impact of success. Analyses and results could further enhance partnerships across the community and the state, leading to stronger support for a program and potential growth going forward.

The partnership between the Court and Easterseals proved immensely successful and provided positive impact for youth participating in the intervention. For sharing of these promising practices to other municipalities, the Altarum team recommends and has supported the Court in sharing their approach widely. From their approach to service delivery under this intervention, other municipalities considering establishing a similar model should consider the following recommendations.

Recommendations for Successful Implementation of Intensive Case Management Interventions

- ▲ Identify the unique challenge within your community that would benefit from an intervention designed to support high-risk youth.
- ▲ Establish strong community partnerships to engage with various organizations and systems that could support program development, sustainability, and service delivery to high-risk youth.
- ▲ Identify champions within the court or the community who would support the implementation of innovative processes.

Conclusion

Funding from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Title II Grant has allowed the Court to increase the capacity of the IFS program by allowing the referral process to the program to occur pre-petition. As a result of their efforts with Easterseals and the IFS program, the Court has been able to provide an alternative for youth in need at “high-risk” for traditional court proceedings. This means that there are a variety of options available to support and directions to take with high-risk youth other than formal court petitions. The data-driven results and meaningful impacts garnered from qualitative data show the program has met the needs of youth and families within their community that may be underlying factors to youth delinquency issues. Data on the ability to successfully divert participating youth from the juvenile justice system coupled with positive testimonials from families involved with the IFS program serve as evidence that the supports and services provided have a positive impact on youths’ lives.

The IFS program offers clear and attainable programming that can be sustained and implemented in ways to best suit any jurisdiction regardless of size. By adopting supportive case management services used in IFS programming, a community can positively impact the lives of some of their most vulnerable citizens and decrease the number of youth and families within the criminal justice system. When considering opportunities for sustainability, communities can look to the qualitative and quantitative data presented in this evaluation and the larger implications and impacts programs of this nature could have on their communities as a whole. While there are limitations to the current quantitative data reported through this evaluation, the responses from the school systems, the court systems, and the consumers indicate immense success. Success of this nature amplifies the opportunity for community buy-in and funding sources resulting in ongoing sustainability programs.